

Fort Stover
Near Luray
Page County
Virginia

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Historic American Buildings Survey

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FORT STOVER
Near Luray, Page Co., Va.

Owner: (1924) G. T. Long

Date: c. 1760

Builder-owner: Samuel Stover

Condition: Fair

Description: Stone, two stories above a basement which is full height at downhill side or west side of the house and completely below grade on the east. The roof is gabled with end, inside, chimneys. The fenestration is irregular, the east front two windows on each floor centered over each other but unsymetrically placed. Also off center is a pair of exterior doors, one over the other. The upper being perhaps used with a hoist as there is no indication of a porch or stair to it. It is known grain and supplies were stored in the upper floors of the Pennsylvania-German houses in the vicinity. The end elevations are equally irregular, the north having a tier of three windows, one being in the attic. The windows are centered over each other at the west side of the elevation. At the east side is just a gable window. In the apex of the gable was once an inscribed panel containing the date, but this, perhaps an inset stone, is now missing. The south end has two irregular tiers of three windows. Off center in the basement wall is a small aperture. The west elevation has three windows symmetrically spaced in the second floor with a door and two windows centered on the wall piers below and below, entirely unrelated, a door and window to the north cellar and a small (formerly barred) aperture to the south cellar. The present sash is all modern but in the attic is stored some of the old sashes which are 9/9 on the first floor and 9/6 on the second floor and 4/4 in the gable ends. The stone work is of small, regularly shaped stones.

In plan each floor is divided into two rooms. On the first floor the exterior doors enter either end of the north room. This is 12'-10" wide by 24' long and once had a fireplace in the northeast corner, which is now closed. The form of the chimney breast is interesting as it is 15'-6" wide and 2' in projection and occupies the entire north end of the room except a recess 8'-6" long at the west end, in which a window is located. This means that the actual width of the room for the larger part of its length is only 10'-10". The reason for the large chimney here is because part of it is occupied by the throat and flue of a very large fireplace in the basement.

The south room is subdivided but the partition is of doubtful antiquity. The chimney breast here is only 7'-7" wide and approximately centers in the room. At either side are external windows with one to the east and two to the west. A sheathed in stair with winders ascends in the northeast corner of this room. The door to the hall at the foot of the stair is modern and perhaps was cut when the room was subdivided. The door opposite the fireplace is original. Neither room possesses other early woodwork except the chair rail in the west room. Formerly there was a corner cupboard here but it is now gone. On the modern partition is hung an old mantle itself similar to that in the great room on the second floor.

The basement is now reached only from the exterior though formerly the interior stair descended to this level. The last five stone treads are still in place though the upper section has disappeared. The basement corresponds roughly to the first floor. The chimney breast, however, projects 3' and contains a fireplace 5' high by 8' long, spanned by an oak lintel. The ceiling of this room is constructed entirely of timbers 7" thick and ranging from 10" to 14" in width, laid side by side. This means the floor is solid wood 7" thick. It is the only example of this construction observed by the writer in Virginia. The floor here and in the adjacent room is of earth. The vaulted room is three steps lower in level than the other. The great thickness of the walls cut the size of this room to 15'-1" x 15'-6" and the height to 7'-8". The east wall is 8' thick, the south 4'-4" and the west 4'-10". The normal thickness of the walls throughout the house is about two feet up to the second floor where it becomes 18'-9". The basement partition wall, however, is only 1'-6". The stone vault is about 3' thick, is segmental with erect walls 3' high. In the west wall is a penetration which is recessed into the ceiling in such a way a man standing in it could see outside but those outside could not see inside the room itself. In the west wall is a long shaft, perhaps once used as a vent or smoke hole. There are shallow recesses in the walls probably for household objects.

The second floor has a fine large room at the north end 21'-2" x 24'-6" and lighted by four windows. The ceiling timbering is exposed and displays a north and south 6½ x 8 girder on the top of which rest 6" x 7" joists about 30" o. c. The north wall contains the chimney breast in which at the west end is a 4'-1" fireplace under a segmental arch and at the east end a paneled cupboard. The flues ascend between the two. The floor of the cupboard is 1'-7½" above the 2nd floor level. It is about 7'-6" high and 4'-3½" wide. It has double paneled doors, with jamb and mullion styles, which are hung with rat-tail hinges. The rest of the length

of the breast is traversed by a heavy moulded shelf hung from wood brackets. This form and the cornice of the cupboard is particularly Pennsylvanian. In it pegs were let at short intervals, presumably for clothes. The chair rail here is similar to that in the first floor south room, being a flat board with a moulded cap. The door to the south room is six paneled with strap hinges and a tulip topped wrought iron latch. The partition wall in which it is hung is sheathed with bead and bevel joints. The trim is a curious simulation of bolection moulding. The form of the sheathed window jamb is characteristic of Pennsylvania, parts of New Jersey and the Hudson Valley. The jamb board is moulded on the thin edge toward the room with a cyma, and forms a plaster stop. The exterior door here is early 19th century in date but the opening itself appears old.

This house was probably built during the French and Indian Wars so incorporated defensive features against Indian attack. The vaulted cellar was the refuge room but the outer room was also partly protected by means of the puncheon ceiling and probably heavy shutters and doors. Samuel Stover or Stauffer, a miller, was a Pennsylvania emigrant of German antecedents. It was from this house that his wife saw the burning of Fort Mifflin in August of 1764.

Thomas Waterman

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